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SUBJECT: NIGER: CORRUPTION SCANDAL HITS CITY HALL

Classified By: Donald W. Koran, DCM, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (U) In the latest phase of Niger's "clean hands" anti-corruption campaign, the Nigerien authorities have arrested a number of Niamey city officials on corruption charges. The actions started at the top, with the November 1 arrest of the president of the city council (essentially the mayor) of Niamey, Aboubacar Seydou Ganda, who was charged with embezzling about \$184,000 of city funds and of improper contracting procedures. His deputy, Aboulaye Haidara, and other city officials were also arrested. All of the men are currently being detained. A dozen businessmen were later arrested in conjunction with the questionable contracting. Some of the businessmen denied involvement, claiming that city workers had forged their names on documents and pocketed the money that was allegedly paid to the businessmen.

¶2. (SBU) Many of those arrested are leading figures in the ruling MNSD party. Both Ganda and Haidara are members of the MNSD executive body. They are linked to the head of the MNSD, Hama Amadou, who stepped down as Prime Minister last May following a no confidence vote by the National Assembly related to allegations of his involvement in corruption associated with the education ministry. He is still viewed as a contender for the 2009 Presidential elections and a political rival of President Tandja. (Tandja is constitutionally barred from seeking another term, but there is widespread speculation that he would like to remain in office after his current term expires in 2009.)

¶3. (C) In an ironic twist, Mayor Ganda was, in his position as President of the Nigerien National Wrestling Federation, actively working with the Embassy and a Military Information Support Team (MIST) on an anti-corruption program at the time of his arrest. Ganda was a conspicuous figure, who owns probably the only Hummer in the country.

¶4. (C) Comment: The arrests are a positive sign of the GON's efforts to fight corruption. It remains to be seen, however, whether the GON follows up on the arrests with the successful prosecution of those charged. Much fanfare was given to the arrest of two government ministers in June 2006 in connection with the education ministry case, but neither man has been brought to trial. (They were initially jailed pending trial, but were later released.) It also remains to be seen whether the GON goes after individuals viewed as close to President Tandja, rather than only allies of his political rival, Hama Amadou.

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